BRITISH ACADEMY SPORTS CENTRE, LIDLINGTON, BEDFORDSHIRE

Agricultural Land Classification
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AGRICULTURAL LAND CLASSIFICATION REPORT

BRITISH ACADEMY SPORTS CENTRE, LIDLINGTON, BEDFORDSHIRE

Introduction

1. This report presents the findings of a detailed Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) survey of 64.3 ha of land at Common Farm, Sheeptick End, Lidlington, Beds. The survey was carried out during March and April 1997.

2. The survey was commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) in connection with an application to develop the land as a British Academy Sports Centre . This site overlaps with two earlier surveys, a reconnaissance one in 19?? (FRCA Ref. Bm3) and a desk study in 1993 (FRCA Ref. 124/93). Both these small scale surveys indicate that the land in the area is likely to be graded 3b. The current survey confirms this and supersedes these previous less detailed ALC surveys.

3. The work was conducted by members of the Cambridge Resource Planning Team, FRCA. The land has been graded in accordance with the published MAFF ALC guidelines and criteria (MAFF, 1988). A description of the ALC grades and subgrades is given in Appendix I.

4. At the time of survey the land use on the site was winter cereals, with scrub, water areas and buildings mapped as other land.

Summary

5. The findings of the survey are shown on the enclosed ALC map. The map has been drawn at a scale of 1:10 000, it is accurate at this scale but any enlargement would be misleading.

6. The area and proportions of the ALC grades and subgrades on the surveyed land are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Area of grades and other land

Grade/Other land	Area (hectares)	% Total site area
3b	56.1	87
Other land	8.2	13
Total surveyed area	64.3	100

7. The fieldwork was conducted at an average density of 1 boring per hectare. A total of 62 borings and two soil pits were described.

8. The agricultural land at the site has been graded entirely 3b (moderate quality land). The imposition of significant wetness/workability limitations restricts the land to this grade. South of the railway line steep gradients (in excess of 7°) also exclude the land from a higher grade.

Factors Influencing ALC Grade

Climate

9. Climate affects the grading of land through the assessment of an overall climatic limitation and also through interactions with soil characteristics.

10. The key climatic variables used for grading this site are given in Table 2 and were obtained from the published 5km grid datasets using the standard interpolation procedures (Met. Office, 1989).

Table 2: Climatic and altitude data

Parameter	Value
Grid reference	SP980389
Altitude (m, AOD)	60
Accumulated Temperature (day °C, Jan.–June)	1420
Average Annual Rainfall (mm)	593
Field Capacity Days	115
Moisture Deficit, Wheat (mm)	114
Moisture Deficit, Potatoes (mm)	108
Overall Climatic Grade	1

11. The climatic criteria are considered first when classifying land, as climate can be overriding in the sense that severe limitations will restrict land to low grades, irrespective of favourable site or soil conditions.

12. The main parameters used in the assessment of an overall climatic limitation are average annual rainfall (AAR), as a measure of overall wetness, and accumulated temperature (ATO, January to June), as a measure of the relative warmth of a locality.

13. The combination of rainfall and temperature at this site mean that it is relatively warm and dry during the critical growing season, therefore imposing no overall limitation to land quality. As a result the site has a climate grade of 1.

Site

14. The majority of the site occupies gently sloping land in the range 50 to 70m AOD. South of the railway line the land rises steeply and in this short distance the altitude ranges from 70 to 90m AOD. This results in the presence of steep slopes (typically 8-9°) which restrict the land to grade 3b in this area. Over the remainder of the site neither gradient nor altitude impose a limitation to the ALC grade.

Geology and soils

15. The published 1:250 000 scale geology map, sheet 52°N-02°W, (Institute of Geological Sciences, 1983) shows the site to comprise Oxford Clay.

16. The soils in the area have been mapped at a scale of 1:63 360 (Sheet 147, Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1968). This map shows the site to comprise the Rowsham Association which is described as gravelly and loamy drift over Jurassic Clays.

17. The current detailed survey of the site identifies one main soil type. This typically comprises heavy clay topsoils over heavy clay subsoils which may merge into calcareous heavy clays with calcium carbonate nodules at depth. Profiles are typically non calcareous in the upper horizons, but where fields have been limed the topsoils may be very slightly or slightly calcareous. Upper subsoils are typically non calcareous even where liming has occurred. Occasionally profiles are calcareous throughout.

Agricultural Land Classification

18. The details of the classification of the site are shown on the attached ALC map and the area statistics of each grade are given in Table 1, page 1.

19. The location of the auger borings and pits is shown on the attached sample location map and the details of the soils data are presented in Appendix III.

Grade 3b

20. The whole of the agricultural land has been graded 3b. Two situations exist.

21. The whole of the site has been graded 3b and is associated with the clayey soils described in paragraph 17. Directly below the topsoils the profiles exhibit gleying and evidence from profile pit examinations indicate that the subsoils are slowly permeable. Consequently this results in a wetness class assessment of III (see Appendix II). This combines with the heavy clay topsoils to restrict the land to grade 3b (moderate quality agricultural land). Although some profiles are calcareous throughout, the presence of greater than 50% clay in the topsoils means that the land is not eligible for the calcareous upgrade.

22. South of the railway line the land is also restricted to 3b because of the presence of steep slopes in the range 8-9°. Slopes of this steepness affect the type of machinery which can be operated safely and efficiently. This imposes a significant limitation which precludes the land from a higher grade.

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SOURCES OF REFERENCE

Institute of Geological Sciences (1983) *Sheet No.52°N-02°W, Solid Geology, East Midlands*. 1:250 000 scale, BGS: London.

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1988) *Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales: Revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land*. MAFF: London.

Met. Office (1989) *Climatological Data for Agricultural Land Classification*. Met. Office: Bracknell.

Soil Survey of England and Wales (1968) *Sheet 147, Soils of the Luton and Bedford District*. 1:63 360 scale, SSEW: Harpenden.

Soil Survey of England and Wales (1984) *Soils and their Use in Eastern England* SSEW: Harpenden

APPENDIX I

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE GRADES AND SUBGRADES

Grade 1: Excellent Quality Agricultural Land

Land with no or very minor limitations to agricultural use. A very wide range of agricultural and horticultural crops can be grown and commonly includes top fruit, soft fruit, salad crops and winter harvested vegetables. Yields are high and less variable than on land of lower quality.

Grade 2: Very Good Quality Agricultural Land

Land with minor limitations which affect crop yield, cultivations or harvesting. A wide range of agricultural or horticultural crops can usually be grown but on some land of this grade there may be reduced flexibility due to difficulties with the production of the more demanding crops such as winter harvested vegetables and arable root crops. The level of yield is generally high but may be lower or more variable than Grade 1 land.

Grade 3: Good to Moderate Quality Land

Land with moderate limitations which affect the choice of crops, the timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield. When more demanding crops are grown, yields are generally lower or more variable than on land in Grades 1 and 2.

Subgrade 3a: Good Quality Agricultural Land

Land capable of consistently producing moderate to high yields of a narrow range of arable crops, especially cereals, or moderate yields of a wide range of crops including cereals, grass, oilseed rape, potatoes, sugar beet and the less demanding horticultural crops.

Subgrade 3b: Moderate Quality Agricultural Land

Land capable of producing moderate yields of a narrow range of crops, principally cereals and grass, or lower yields of a wider range of crops or high yields of grass which can be grazed or harvested over most of the year.

Grade 4: Poor Quality Agricultural Land

Land with severe limitations which significantly restrict the range of crops and/or the level of yields. It is mainly suited to grass with occasional arable crops (e.g. cereals and forage crops) the yields of which are variable. In moist climates, yields of grass may be moderate to high but there may be difficulties in utilisation. The grade also includes very droughty arable land.

Grade 5: Very Poor Quality Agricultural Land

Land with severe limitations which restrict use to permanent pasture or rough grazing, except for occasional pioneer forage crops.

APPENDIX II

SOIL WETNESS CLASSIFICATION

Definitions of Soil Wetness Classes

Soil wetness is classified according to the depth and duration of waterlogging in the soil profile. Six soil wetness classes are identified and are defined in the table below.

Wetness Class	Duration of waterlogging[1]
I	The soil profile is not wet within 70 cm depth for more than 30 days in most years.[2]
II	The soil profile is wet within 70 cm depth for 31-90 days in most years **or**, if there is no slowly permeable layer within 80 cm depth, it is wet within 70 cm for more than 90 days, but only wet within 40 cm depth for 30 days in most years.
III	The soil profile is wet within 70 cm depth for 91-180 days in most years **or**, if there is no slowly permeable layer present within 80 cm depth, it is wet within 70 cm for more than 180 days, but only wet within 40 cm depth for between 31-90 days in most years.
IV	The soil profile is wet within 70 cm depth for more than 180 days but not wet within 40 cm depth for more than 210 days in most years **or**, if there is no slowly permeable layer present within 80 cm depth, it is wet within 40 cm depth for 91-210 days in most years.
V	The soil profile is wet within 40 cm depth for 211-335 days in most years.
VI	The soil profile is wet within 40 cm depth for more than 335 days in most years.

Assessment of Wetness Class

Soils have been allocated to wetness classes by the interpretation of soil profile characteristics and climatic factors using the methodology described in *Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales: Revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land* (MAFF, 1988).

[1] The number of days is not necessarily a continuous period.
[2] 'In most years' is defined as more than 10 out of 20 years.

APPENDIX III

SOIL DATA

Contents:

APPENDIX III

SOIL DATA

Contents:

[Sample Location Map]

SOIL PROFILE DESCRIPTIONS: EXPLANATORY NOTE

Soil pit and auger boring information collected during ALC fieldwork is held on a computer database. This uses notations and abbreviations as set out below.

Boring Header Information

1. **GRID REF**: national 100 km grid square and 8 figure grid reference.

2. **USE**: Land use at the time of survey. The following abbreviations are used.

ARA:	Arable	**WHT:**	Wheat	**BAR**:	Barley
CER:	Cereals	**OAT**:	Oats	**MZE**:	Maize
OSR:	Oilseed rape	**BEN**:	Field Beans	**BRA**:	Brassicae
POT:	Potatoes	**SBT**:	Sugar Beet	**FCD**:	Fodder Crops
LIN:	Linseed	**FRT**:	Soft and Top Fruit	**FLW**:	Fallow
PGR:	Permanent Pasture	**LEY**:	Ley Grass	**RGR**:	Rough Grazing
SCR:		Scrub	**CFW**:	Coniferous Woodland	
DCW: Deciduous Wood					
HTH:	Heathland	**BOG**:	Bog or Marsh	**FLW**:	Fallow
PLO:	Ploughed	**SAS**:	Set aside	**OTH**:	Other
HRT:	Horticultural Crops				

3. **GRDNT**: Gradient as estimated or measured by a hand-held optical clinometer.

4. **GLEY/SPL**: Depth in centimetres (cm) to gleying and/or slowly permeable layers.

5. **AP (WHEAT/POTS)**: Crop-adjusted available water capacity.

6. **MB (WHEAT/POTS)**: Moisture Balance. (Crop adjusted AP - crop adjusted MD)

7. **DRT**: Best grade according to soil droughtiness.

8. If any of the following factors are considered significant, 'Y' will be entered in the relevant column.

MREL:	Microrelief limitation	**FLOOD:**	Flood risk	**EROSN**:	Soil erosion risk
EXP:	Exposure limitation	**FROST**:	Frost prone	**DIST**:	Disturbed land
CHEM:	Chemical limitation				

9. **LIMIT**: The main limitation to land quality. The following abbreviations are used.

OC:	Overall Climate	**AE**:	Aspect	**EX**:	Exposure
FR:	Frost Risk	**GR**:	Gradient	**MR**:	Microrelief
FL:	Flood Risk	**TX**:	Topsoil Texture	**DP**:	Soil Depth
CH:	Chemical	**WE**:	Wetness	**WK**:	Workability
DR:	Drought	**ER**:	Erosion Risk	**WD**:	Soil Wetness/Droughtiness
ST:	Topsoil Stoniness				

Soil Pits and Auger Borings

1. **TEXTURE**: soil texture classes are denoted by the following abbreviations.

S:	Sand	**LS**:	Loamy Sand	**SL**:	Sandy Loam
SZL:	Sandy Silt Loam	**CL**:	Clay Loam	**ZCL**:	Silty Clay Loam
ZL:	Silt Loam	**SCL**:	Sandy Clay Loam	**C**:	Clay
SC:	Sandy Clay	**ZC**:	Silty Clay	**OL**:	Organic Loam
P:	Peat	**SP**:	Sandy Peat	**LP**:	Loamy Peat
PL:	Peaty Loam	**PS**:	Peaty Sand	**MZ**:	Marine Light Silts

For the sand, loamy sand, sandy loam and sandy silt loam classes, the predominant size of sand fraction will be indicated by the use of the following prefixes:

F: Fine (more than 66% of the sand less than 0.2mm)
M: Medium (less than 66% fine sand and less than 33% coarse sand)
C: Coarse (more than 33% of the sand larger than 0.6mm)

The clay loam and silty clay loam classes will be sub-divided according to the clay content: **M:** Medium (<27% clay) **H**: Heavy (27-35% clay)

2. **MOTTLE COL**: Mottle colour using Munsell notation.

3. **MOTTLE ABUN**: Mottle abundance, expressed as a percentage of the matrix or surface described.

F: few <2% **C:** common 2-20% **M**: many 20-40% **VM**: very many 40% +

4. **MOTTLE CONT:** Mottle contrast

F: faint - indistinct mottles, evident only on close inspection
D: distinct - mottles are readily seen
P: prominent - mottling is conspicuous and one of the outstanding features of the horizon

5. **PED. COL**: Ped face colour using Munsell notation.

6. **GLEY:** If the soil horizon is gleyed a 'Y' will appear in this column. If slightly gleyed, an 'S' will appear.

7. **STONE LITH**: Stone Lithology - One of the following is used.

HR:	all hard rocks and stones	**SLST**:	soft oolitic or dolimitic limestone
CH:	chalk	**FSST**:	soft, fine grained sandstone
ZR:	soft, argillaceous, or silty rocks	**GH**:	gravel with non-porous (hard) stones
MSST:	soft, medium grained sandston	**GS**:	gravel with porous (soft) stones
SI:	soft weathered igneous/metamorphic rock		

Stone contents (>2cm, >6cm and total) are given in percentages (by volume).

8. **STRUCT**: the degree of development, size and shape of soil peds are described using the following notation:

degree of development	**WK**: weakly developed **ST**: strongly developed	**MD**: moderately developed
ped size	**F**: fine **C**: coarse	**M**: medium **VC**: very coarse
ped shape	**S** : single grain **GR**: granular **SAB**: sub-angular blocky **PL**: platy	**M**: massive **AB**: angular blocky **PR**: prismatic

9. **CONSIST**: Soil consistence is described using the following notation:

L: loose **VF**: very friable **FR**: friable **FM**: firm **VM**: very firm
EM: extremely firm **EH**: extremely hard

10. **SUBS STR**: Subsoil structural condition recorded for the purpose of calculating profile droughtiness: **G**: good **M**: moderate **P**: poor

11. **POR**: Soil porosity. If a soil horizon has less than 0.5% biopores >0.5 mm, a 'Y' will appear in this column.

12. **IMP**: If the profile is impenetrable to rooting a 'Y' will appear in this column at the appropriate horizon.

13. **SPL**: Slowly permeable layer. If the soil horizon is slowly permeable a 'Y' will appear in this column.

14. **CALC**: If the soil horizon is calcareous, a 'Y' will appear in this column.

15. Other notations
APW: available water capacity (in mm) adjusted for wheat
APP: available water capacity (in mm) adjusted for potatoes
MBW: moisture balance, wheat
MBP: moisture balance, potatoes